7: Thompson--371-372 J-4 (no date) 1937 Laotians
116, 565, 567, 177.56 France
636.56

"The people were simply divided into slaves and freemen. Of the former there were three kinds: slaves for debt, by sale, or by capture. Slave-trading used to be enormously profitable, for the offspring of slaves were born into perpetual slavery. In 1880 the King of Siam made a generous reform. The descendants of slaves were henceforth to be freemen, and it was made much easier for debt slaves to buy their freedom. No mention was made, however, of captured slaves, but severe penalties were meted out to men convicted of slave-trading. One of the first steps taken by the French was the abolition of the slave trade, despite its affecting important Laotian, Cambodian, Siamese, and even Burmese commercial interests. Next, debt slavery was attacked in 1896, and for this Tournier found an ingenious solution. Special attention [372] was paid to the Khas, who lived in a state of serfdom, and this provoked a series of revolts. Their enfranchisement was begun in 1898, and nowadays a form of patron-client relationship has been evolved, but the bond is easy. It is almost impossible to wipe the slate clean, for many of the slaves resist change, since it is an easier way of getting rid of a debt than by working as freemen."

10: d'Orleans--299-300 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 565, 646

"There is an hereditary assembly called the Sena, to which the members of certain families belong. The king can create new members, but cannot remove any, and the [300] Sena is a sort of House of Peers possessing the right of remonstrance. In fact, the Governmental acts bear the preamble, 'The Sena and the King,' the former being given precedence."

10: d'Orleans--354 T-3 (1891-92) 1894 Laos
116, 177, 565, 644

[LSS: During the New Year celebration in Luang Prabang.]
"After a few more prayers in the pagoda, he [LSS: the king] returns home, preceded by his courtiers who are dressed in the Laos fashion, like the rest of the people, without any distinguishing sign, and who carry cups, boxes, a teapot, and other articles all of wrought gold, and most of them given by the King of Siam. It is surprising to notice side by side with these a small yellow tin box containing clothes, a French deal box, painted to represent carriages and horses, a phial containing scent, and a crystal bottle such as one may see in a hairdresser's shop. All this is indicative of what must happen in a country which is overrun, as this one will be, by the bad taste of what I may call a cheap and nasty civilisation. [sic] "

victorious (1), and this expedition, which would seem to have 648*
643*

1. With the help of Trân-Ninh. 728
175*

been imposed on him, is the only campaign which is related during his long forty-three year reign.

According to the Annals he strictly observed the Buddhist teaching and followed, in a more docile manner than his father had done, the pious counsels of Pha-Maha-Pasaman-Thala-Tiao, his spiritual director, "and so his kingdom knew a long period of peace and prosperity." He was a great builder of temples, and erected the pagodas of Manorom, Ouposot (with a library which was given the manuscripts which had been brought from Angkor), and Xieng-Kang which was built in memory of his daughter, the young princess Sivayaka, who died of smallpox at the age of twelve. 643* 175* /645 792/

The Three Hundred Thousand Thaïs. In 1376 he gave orders for a general census of the inhabitants of Lang-Xang. The results gave 300,000 "registered" Thaïs, not counting women, children, bonzes, foreigners, slaves and Khas (2), and Oun-Hueun took /53/ 161 175* 654

2. The number of registered non-Thaïs was about 400,000.

/C.A.M. Translator's note. Page 53 is devoted to a map: "Lan-Xang and surrounding regions at the death of Fa-Ngoun (1374)"./ as his reigning name Phaya-Sam-Sène-Thaï, the King of the Three Hundred Thousand Thaïs.

Social Organization. These folk then constituted a society grouped by families and divided into Nobles and Commoners. The Nobles were given certain privileges and helped to administer the kingdom, from the dignitaries who were princes of royal blood down to the simple officials who were responsible for collecting taxes, for assembling labor drafts, for transporting goods, etc. 631 565 175*

In the provinces the heads of circumscriptions (Muongs) were elected either from the Nobles or from the Commoners, but the choice of the electors generally fell on the son or some relative of the person who was to be replaced, unless there were some unworthiness or notorious incapability.

565 The common people, kind and carefree in character, roamed
175* over the country in all directions as easy-going masters, leaving
/462/ household tasks to the women and the work of the fields to dependents of an inferior race or to slaves. They were excellent boatmen and traders rather than farmers, so that they liked to perform the function of peddlers and served as a link between the multiple /55/ varieties of mankind which inhabited Lan-Xang.

567 Slavery existed--slaves could be obtained through capture, as
175* the result of debt or through trade--and brought high profits to those
563 who engaged in this traffic. In the region of Muong-Swa there was also a kind of serfdom which was applied to certain Kha tribes placed under the patronage of the king, the princes or the chief representatives of the nobility.

565 But if we consider the gentle and happy temperament of this
175* people whose good humor made up for everything, we are justified in believing that the relations between the various social levels must have been free of any harshness.

191 They spoke a dialect derived from the language which was im-
ported into the basin of the Ménam by Rama Khamheng at the end of the thirteenth century and which was itself derived from the
771 graphs of India (1). They practiced orthodox Buddhism together
793
554

1. Cf. Mission Pavie, op. cit. /Études diverses, Vol. II, "Recherches sur l'Histoire du Cambodge du Laos et du Siam"/ Inscription of Sukhothaï translated by Father Schmitt, p. 192: "It was in (1287 A. D.) that the king Rama-Khameng summoned a teacher who created Thaï writing."

with the cult of the "Phi" or Genii which represented for them the beneficent or maleficent forces of Nature. The bonzes were of comparatively pure morals amidst these peoples for whom enjoyment and pleasure were, when /56/ all is considered, the true gods. Although they were fairly ignorant and recited their prayers in Pali
/782/ without understanding them, they did not lack a certain air of nobility. They also enjoyed a high regard and had as much favor as they could desire. The bonzeries[1] which were built near the pagodas were at once places of inviolable asylum, schools frequented by all the children of the village, and workshops where trades could be learned.

/[1] Buddhist Monasteries--Analyst./

633 be seen from a great distance. To be sure, it extends over a prodigi-
174 ous area and is so large that one would take it for a city... The king's
344 apartments, which are embellished with a superb and magnificent portico and a large number of beautiful rooms accompanied by a large parlor, are all made of wood which will not decay and ornamented inside and outside with excellent bas-reliefs so delicately gilded that they seem rather to be covered with flakes of gold than gold leaf.

"From that point one enters the courtyards which are extremely spacious, and one first sees a long line of houses built entirely of brick and roofed /113/ with tile in which the second wives usually stay, and outside another row of houses built alongside in the same symmetry for the mandarins' officers. I could write a whole volume if I undertook a minute description of all the other parts of the palace, the riches, the departments, the gardens and a number of other such things...

565 "The houses of the principal lords and of well-to-do persons are
342 very high and beautiful, and are all made of wood with a great deal
352 of artifice and a greater or lesser number of ornaments, depending on the expense to which the individuals are willing to go, but I must confess that the common people and the poor are housed extremely badly
/793/ and that their dwellings are cabins and huts rather than houses. Only the talapoins (bonzes), who are the priests of the idols, have permission to build their monasteries and houses out of brick and stone. Instead of rugs and other such furnishings, persons of quality use small reed mats in which the weave is so delicate and so highly ornamented with figures and various leaf patterns that, to my mind, there is nothing more beautiful nor more pleasing to the eye. They ordinarily use them to cover the walls of /114/ their rooms and houses inside and outside, which they keep very clean and of which they take particular care...

643* "The king is absolute and independent... all the land belongs to
/423/ him, and he disposes as absolute lord of all that his subjects possess...
631 offices, employment, honors and wealth depend absolutely on the
174 king, who raises those persons who please him most to the highest offices in the kingdom.... The principal dignities and offices of the kingdom are eight in number. The first is that of viceroy general... and because the kingdom is divided into seven provinces seven other viceroys are appointed... there are also other governments of less consequence which depend on the former both in respect to civil affairs and to those which concern war.... Each of these provinces has
/701/ its militia, which consists of infantry and cavalry.

"But in regard to the kingdom's laws, it is a certain fact that 671
there are very few of them, because, in my opinion, there is no 571
great need of any in order to live in accordance with the customs 626
of the land. The people are brought up to work, to have very little
to do with foreigners, not to undertake anything which might dis-
turb them and to live an idle and /115/ listless life although not
lacking any of the things necessary to preserve it. The king's will,
which does not greatly interfere with his people, takes the place
of a great many laws for them.... The manner in which the in-
habitants of the land live with one another is highly civil and
obliging. Unfriendliness and quarrels are banished... they all have
enough to live on and get along on, so that one does not hear of
thieves except as a thing quite out of the ordinary.... But the /565/
mandarins do not behave in the same way. Indeed, their insolence
and their insulting and criminal conduct dim the praise which the
common people merit on this account, because they abuse the
power which they have in the kingdom, and when they see some-
thing which pleases them... they act in such wise as to find means
for taking possession of it.

"But if we should now pass to the person of the king in order to 643*
describe him, there is no monarch, no matter how powerful, whom 174
he does not regard as beneath him, and it would indeed seem that 648
he affects not to yield in any particular to the emperors of China...
Only rarely does he appear in public... preferring to be worshiped
by his people as a hidden God rather than as a man like themselves
and of the same nature... He allows himself to be seen only twice
/116/ a year, for a period of three days, by his people, who re-
ceive this grace from their prince with such gratitude and joyous
sentiments that he forgets nothing on these occasions which might
contribute to their amusement. For this purpose there are several /527/
elephants which are trained to do a thousand little tricks and several wild
animals which are kept chained and made to fight... finally there
are wrestlers and gladiators and others, with their skirmishes which
last until last until evening and terminate all this rejoicing...

"Of all the prerogatives which he (the king) has, and which are 643*
a further mark of the extent of his power, that of having several 576
petty tributary kings in his dependency who come to his court to do
him homage and acknowledge him as their sovereign and who give
him superb presents, is by no means the least. He receives these
ambassadors in a great parlor seated on an extremely high throne
and garbed in his ceremonial robes, and replies to their civilities

285 lacquer -- red on the inside and black on the outside -- and deco-
532 rated with a fine gilt design which makes a border, like a galloon" (1).
175*

1. Cf. G. Maspero, ibid. /Un empire colonial francais: l'Indochine. Paris, 1929-1930/, pp. 190-191.

286 Even today weaving remains women's work, and is done solely in
462 the home. The materials, which may be silk or cotton, striped or
532 splashed with colors, embroidered or spangled with gold and silver thread, nevertheless acquire, under the action of light and carefree hands, chatoyant, harmonious or dazzling tones, and yet the looms which are used are simple in the extreme. Patterns "are obtained, as before the invention of the Jacquard loom, by alternately isolating or raising certain woof threads by means of thin bamboo splints" (2).

2. Cf. L. de Reinach, ibid. /Le Laos, posthumous edition, Paris, 1911/, p. 338.

181 Thus did the Laotian of the seventeenth century live in peace, respecting the law of the least effort with an amiable perserverance amidst his laughter and his games. . . . The princes were perhaps the
● /565/ only ones in the whole kingdom to know any of the worries which power and its exigencies bring, and it was for not having wished to compromise with his authoritarian principles that King Souligna, towards the end of his reign, compromised the destinies of his people forever.

643* Condemnation of the heir apparent to death. He had three chil-
175* dren, a son Tiao Ratsabout and two daughters. His son married Nang-
648* Tian-Koumali, who gave birth in her turn to two children, King-Kitsarath and Intha-Som. Nang-Tian-Koumali was the sister of a prince of the Sip-Song-Panas who had been driven out of his country by a Chinese invasion and whom the king of Lan-Xang had welcomed in Vientiane together with his family. Tiao Ratsabout, however, committed the imprudence of seducing the wife of the chief palace page. In accordance with his edict which punished the crime of
/684/ adultery by death, Souligna pitilessly referred the deceived husband's complaint to the royal tribunal and allowed his son to be sentenced to capital punishment

The result was that at the king's death, which occurred /130/ in 1694, the direct heirs to the crown were his grandsons King-Kitsarath

764 the fire collapsed. In a great shower of sparks, in the middle of a
787 long blue flame, the coffin tottered and fortunately leaned to the right side. The dead man's spirit was satisfied, and it was also an excellent omen for the prosperity of the Muong.

764 [214] Now the pyre, the catafalque, the coffin, the corpse and all were nothing more than an immense live fire, an incandescent mass which projected bizarre flashes on the motley crowd and gave to it, in the evening twilight beside the great river, a phantasmagorical air.

From time to time one of the posts of the canopy could be seen in the center of the fire, rising towards the sky like a gigantic torch. The coffin toppled, and for the space of a second the corpse seemed to appear grimacing and twisting in the middle of the flames, like a salamander.

The whole fire fell in, and the crackling noises lessened. Two or three tongues of flame shot out here and there, only to be extinguished immediately. The coals finished burning themselves out, and soon nothing was left of the pyre and of the whole edifice, so bizarrely decorated, but a pile of gray ashes in the middle of which a few whitish and incompletely burned bone fragments could still be seen. With night the last gleams of the pyre disappeared, the last coals went out and the only light remaining was that of the twinkling stars.

Early the next day the bonzes went to the spot where the pyre had stood. They collected the ashes which had been cooled by dew during the night and then, after throwing a few handfuls to the four winds, they used the rest to draw a crude human face on the ground. The few whitish bones which were still left and which crumbled at the touch were collected and placed in a jar of ordinary earth, which would be buried in the enclosure of a pagoda at the foot of a sacred "ficus."

• [585] Later on, since the deceased had been well-to-do and his family was wealthy, the latter would be helped by the people of the province to build a brick pyramid called "That" inside the pagoda enclosure.

A few ashes in an urn and, in some, the memory of a great celebration and a few good meals...and that is all that remained of the man who had long been a great leader in his province.

533 Music. "Instrumental music holds a place of honor in Laos.
534 The instruments are few in number, and are of Malayan and Chinese origin.

527 Those desirous of obtaining special graces give similar celebrations
182 which last several days and several nights, and the offerings are more beautiful and more varied. It is generally on occasions of this sort that assumptions of the habit by bonzes and their pupils are particularly likely to occur.

Being present at these ceremonies confers certain indulgences, and that is why they are so punctually followed and why all those who take part try [224] to help in celebrating them by offerings of all sorts.

[196] On the spot where the celebration is to be held, a sort of pulpit is constructed beforehand where the bonzes stand as they come up by turns to read passages chosen for the occasion from the sacred books. They never allow themselves to be disturbed by the surrounding noise, but stand as if transfixed in the middle of the songs and shouts.

It is readily understandable that this should be an agreeable way to procure one's salvation, but since it is very costly it is not within everyone's means. Fortunately, there are ways of compromising with [565] heaven which enable even the poorest to associate themselves in these great celebrations, in accordance with their resources, by means of even very modest offerings and to benefit therefrom both spiritually and materially.

There is no doubt but that a belief in the efficacy of plenary and partial indulgences enters into their consideration, but it is equally reasonable to suppose that the attraction of the profane pleasures which one enjoys in the course of these gatherings is not the least of the motivating causes which lead the Laotian people to frequent them so zealously.

[171] Pirogue races. We have seen that pirogue races and regattas took place during some of the legal holidays, and a few words of explanation on this matter are given below.

526 This custom must have been introduced by the Malays and then
501 handed down from the Kmers to the Laotians, following an ascending direction from south to north.

The pirogues used in the "Souang-Hua" (1) regattas are specially

(1) Literally, pirogues which run.

built and exclusively reserved for this use. Sometimes as much as twenty-five meters in length, they are hewn out of specially chosen wood and have most elegant delicate and elongated lines. Their extremities are armed with what appear to be slender gilded horns. The exterior is lacquered black with gold ornamentation and the

505 Large quantities of rice (rice suitable
438 for making alcohol), hides, horn, cardamom, wax, benzoin, various gums, etc. were shipped from Bassac, from Pakse, from Savannakhet, from Vien-Tiane and from other Laotian centers which had formerly traded exclusively with Bangkok by way of the Nongkay-Outaradit route on the Menam and by the Korat route on the Se-Moun.

505 "Passenger traffic, which was almost nil when the new services
484 were established, is increasing every day. The natives are beginning to become familiar with this rapid, convenient and inexpensive manner of traveling which the steamship represents and they are making more frequent use thereof, a fact which can only contribute to the broadening of relations between the various posts scattered along the great river and increase trade in their products of all kinds" (1).

(1) See, in Appendix XXX, the transport rates between France and Indo-China and between Saigon and Laos.

[487] [Illustration at top of page]

CHAPTER XI
1. SOCIAL STATUS. SLAVERY

[565] Upon our arrival in Laos, we found a hierarchial society com-
567 prised of nobles, commoners and slaves. We could not do better than to preserve all features of the political, social and administrative
178 organization just as it had been. In this respect we took our inspira-
177 tion from our predecessors the Siamese, leaving our new subjects the utmost liberty and respecting their traditions, customs and mores insofar as these were compatible with our own institutions.

Thus we were at times forced to recall certain native officials who had compromised themselves with the Siamese, or who through their exactions had made themselves unworthy of their office. Moreover, we have always acted tactfully and mildly, [488] leaving the choice of officials to election, in accordance with custom.

But above all, we took radical measures by completely suppressing the slave trade and by regularizing a very mild form of slavery for debt.

[556] There used to be slavery in Laos, as in Siam, in the form of slavery by capture, by purchase and for debt. It yielded high profits for those who engaged in the traffic, for the children and grandchildren of slaves were slaves themselves at birth, a fact which increased the fortunes of their masters to that extent.

000 indispensable for us to be acquainted with customs of our French friends. This is to prevent that in the course of a French-Laotian gathering we should be embarrassed in our actions and gestures. The French on their side should not be ignorant of our customs; a gesture of Laotian politeness might well be misinterpreted by those who are unacquainted with our customs, and that would be a regrettable misunderstanding.

How a Laotian Mandarin Should Behave.

647 576 A high Laotian functionary, in order to be worthy of his rank, must have a different bearing depending on whether he finds himself in the exercise /977/ of his functions, among his family, or at private gatherings.

577 647 In the office.--In his office the mandarin behaves in an irreproachable fashion in order to show himself worthy of the functions that he holds. In this way he sets a good example to the officials who are under his authority. Before he reprimands one of his subordinates, he must have thought the matter over to get a clear idea of the effects that his reprimand may have. The man who has received the reprimand will not fail to answer, in effect, any unfounded criticism. If the head of a department hands out reprimands on every possible occasion, even for minimal matters, his staff will end up by being used to his unnecessary harangues. By this process one scarcely makes oneself obeyed and respected. In short, the mandarin should "turn his tongue seven times in his mouth" before speaking; he has a correct appearance and is concerned about his reputation and his honor.

593 647 666 In the family.--The mandarin must be a good father of his family in the company of his wife and of his children. He facilitates the household work entrusted to his wife, in place of picking quarrels with her from vain motives. Crude forms of expression may give rise to arguments. It is up to you, mandarin, to avoid them. It is possible that your wife may throw you into a fit of anger. In that case it is up to you to control yourself and at the same time to try and appease your companion by consoling words. If one of the partners in a marriage is "fire," so goes a Laotian adage, the other must

naturally be "water." These two elements, opposed though they are 593
to one another, nonetheless go together. If you should happen to 647
raise your voice, see to it that it does not reach the ears of your 565
neighbors who will be sure to laugh at your domestic misunderstanding.
There is a good way to appease your anger: that is to go out and get
some fresh air. A moment of distraction will calm your irritation.
This precious and effective remedy is called, according to a Laotian
expression, "to caress one's heart with a hand drenched with fresh
water."

On a walk and on a visit.--Formerly it used to be considered 574
a disgrace for a mandarin to go for a walk by himself or to visit minor 647
functionaries. Nowadays this is no longer the case. A Laotian 565
Minister goes out alone without being accompanied by the traditional 178
retinue. He visits all classes of society without being criticized for
it by anyone at all.

At a private gathering.--In contrast to the customs of former
times, present-day mandarins accept the invitation of a simple
citizen. The host very often organizes various diversions: dances, /533/
lamvong, orchestras, songs etc. The Ministers willingly participate /535/
in these; they sing, dance, and pay their respects to the phousaos
while they mingle with the crowd. Certain Laotians whom I consider
backward criticize the liberal manner on the part of our Ministers.
Our great mandarins are their own masters. Let them turn a deaf
ear to these carpings. /978/

Honor Laotian Women

Some people consider the Laotian woman as an inferior 562
creature.

Certain women, it appears, are not permitted to eat with
their husband. Miserable husbands! You consider then that your
better half is like an animal?

Certainly, tradition says: "The woman must sleep with her /513/
head lower than her husband's. She must go to bed after him and
she must get up before him. The husband must have eaten three /264/
mouthfuls of rice before the wife can begin to eat in her turn."

These counsels of our fathers are valuable, but they are far
from indicating that the woman is inferior to the man. They recommend,